

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

NewsNet puts newsletters 'on line'

With hundreds of specialized newsletters providing competitive information for business owners and managers, it was just a matter of time before someone came up with the idea of providing newsletters "on-line" to computer users.

NewsNet, a Bryn Mawr, Pa., on-line data base, is offering some 330 newsletters, ranging in content from Federal Communication Commission rulings to tax news to investment tips. Users can access one or all of the newsletters directly from their modem-equipped personal computers.

If the sheer volume of NewsNet's information sounds overwhelming, relax: you don't have to sift through all 330 newsletters to find the information you want. NewsNet will do it for you.

One of the most attractive features of this service is called "NewsFlash." For a modest fee,

subscribers can direct NewsNet to search through the entire data base daily for any reference to a specific topic or name. Whenever the service "hits" on that topic — for example, a reference to a company or product name — it automatically places a short description of the article on a list from which you can choose the items you'd like to read.

While on line, you can also opt to scan any one or more newsletters for specific topics, choosing the latest issue or any date or time period. The commands are simple and straightforward. In fact, the entire News-

Net service is very easy to set up and use. Its only real drawback is price.

Charges are a total of four components:

✓ **Subscription fees.** This is the basic charge for joining NewsNet, regularly assessed at \$15 a month.

The charge drops to \$10 on introductory subscriptions.

✓ **On-line rates.** These are the fees for the time your computer is actually linked to the NewsNet system. Charged at a rate of \$60 an hour. This includes all telephone charges.

✓ **Premiums.** These are royalties paid to the newsletters when you read the publications on-line. These fees vary by newsletter and whether the on-line user also subscribes to the printed version. A common charge is \$80 an hour for subscribers vs. \$108 for non-subscribers.

✓ **NewsFlash charges.** These are charges for each "hit" when an off-line search for specific topics or key words is ordered. The charge is 50 cents for each reference found, whether or not you choose to look at the article. Should you decide to read it, the premium charge described above is applied. The best part of this service is that a NewsFlash search is done off-line and does not involve expensive connect time. To log on

briefly to see if a topic was mentioned may cost as little as \$1.

Although each individual charge may not sound like much, the dollars add up and you could easily spend more than \$100 a month if you're not careful. It's no surprise, therefore, that NewsNet appeals primarily to large corporations where legal and technical developments frequently require immediate attention.

The bottom line: With prices for most newsletters running in the \$200-a-year range, even smaller firms may find some use for NewsNet. Check the list of newsletters offered and determine whether the information you're after can be obtained more cost-effectively by computer. To obtain a copy of the on-line list, call NewsNet, (800) 345-1301.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.



Segal